



# RESTORATION MAN

IF YOU LIVE, WORK OR PLAY IN THE PRECINCT, CHANCES ARE YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED NAT CHESHIRE - OR AT LEAST HIS WORK. WE CAUGHT UP WITH ONE OF BRITOMART'S BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS TO FIND OUT A LITTLE ABOUT HIS OWN HISTORY.

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For someone who's spent a good portion of his career defining the character of some of Britomart's most exciting venues, Nat Cheshire is not easily categorised himself.

As co-founder of Cheshire Architects, the 30-year-old calculates that he has – or soon will have – had a hand in transforming four city blocks, including the spaces inhabited by 1885 Britomart, Cafe Hanoi, The Britomart Country Club and the Showcase, the modern new retail development in the centre of the precinct.

It's a role that has called on him to design, furnish and even on occasion construction-manage, but the description he prefers is 'delineator', which literally means 'someone who draws a line'.

### DRAWING OUT BEAUTY

As he chats to Scenezine over a Precinct Cafe breakfast of fruit salad and a smoothie, it's clear Nat has a strong affinity for the spaces he's helped return to a state of grace and respect. He says the challenge of bringing the beauty out of buildings destined for demolition is what has made his half-decade at Britomart so satisfying.

"For every ounce of blood you put into those buildings they give back two. They are so rich – and the spaces are so strong – that they end up affecting everybody involved.

"When I sit in the Basement bar at 1885 Britomart, for example, which is one of the most luxurious spaces in the city, I occasionally think back to the underwater rubbish dump it was when we first arrived. My respect for these operators and developers who saw a future in the midst of that dilapidation and decay knows no bounds."

It could all have turned out very differently. The son of a highly respected architect, former Jasmax managing director Pip Cheshire, Nat says painting was the creative expression he initially favoured.

He spent a year at Elam before taking time out and becoming enraptured by the "secret beauty of how buildings are put together". He was soon back at the University of Auckland – this time studying architecture, while running a boutique design practice on the side.

In 2005, a year before he was due to graduate, he was offered the chance to join his father in establishing Cheshire Architects, based at what was then the mostly derelict downtown site of Cooper and Company's grand dream. It wasn't Nat's ideal location: as an 11-year-old he'd been robbed of a favourite pair of shoes while visiting a popular Spacies parlour in the area.

But it soon became clear that giving form to Peter Cooper's unique vision for the development was an incredible opportunity for a young architect-in-the-making.

### SWEAT AND CHEERS

From overseeing the restoration of the Stanbeth and Excelsior buildings, Nat moved on to the "very different and invigorating" outdoor space of The Britomart Country Club.





There he found himself construction-managing the final month of the project, with many of the newly-recruited hospitality staff pitching in.

He paints an incongruous picture of urbane young things swinging sledgehammers and driving belt sanders in a joint effort that – literally – helped cement an extraordinary team, and “gave them real ownership of the place”.

The venue is still one of his favourites: “My great weekend pleasure is to arrive at the Country Club in the early afternoon, and sprawl out in a beanbag on the grass with a jug of Pimm’s and some scones with jam and cream.

“More often than not, nine hours later I’ll still be there and it will have slowly changed from little kids running around playing on the putting green, to an early evening cocktail garden, to a night-time bar. I find it satisfying that we’ve been able to deliver a new kind of hospitality experience that can cross all those spaces.”

#### SHAPING SPACE

In all his work, Nat is committed to providing “something that lives up to the future that we collectively envisage for this place”. A future that he describes as offering Aucklanders an experience as good as – if not better than – the one they could expect in cities like Melbourne and New York.

“We have eight construction sites down here at the moment; soon there will be four whole blocks that we’ve designed and shaped in partnership with Cooper and Company and their extraordinary tenants.

“That’s an unprecedented opportunity to shape urban space. Working here, I feel incredibly fortunate; there’s no better time to be alive, and no better place to be doing this sort of work.” ■